

Horticulture Hotline

HORTICULTURE

February 2008

Starting out on the right “root”

Debbie Stamper, Extension Master Gardener

We've all probably done it – reused a pot for planting without cleaning it first. Before reusing any type of pot, whether terra-cotta, plastic or ceramic, it needs to be free of any possible disease. It is also important to remember that all potting tools should be free of disease before using as well. To be certain your containers and tools are clean and ready for the planting season, try the cleaning method suggested by Colorado State University.

In a tub or large bucket, combine one part bleach to nine parts water. Clean each pot or tool by scrubbing it with a wire brush to remove all remaining dirt and deposits. In some cases, it may be helpful to use a knife

to remove any stubborn or sticky deposits. If your plant container is made of a porous material such as terra-cotta, you will need to soak it for at least 24 hours prior to the actual cleaning process. Not only will this help rid the container of any diseases hiding in the pores, it will also make it easier to remove dirt and stains. After the pot has been thoroughly cleaned, rinse it in a bucket of clear water to remove any traces of the bleach which could be harmful to a plant. Allow the pot to air-dry in the sun.

For online information relating to this process and other horticultural topics, you can go to <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/menugard.html>, <http://gardendata.org> or visit the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/>.

By following this simple gardening tip, you can be sure you are starting your plants out on the right “root.”

2008 Herb of the Year

The International Herb Association has designated Calendula as the 2008 Herb of the Year. More commonly known as Pot Marigold, Calendula is an herb with a sunny disposition due to its orange, yellow, gold or cream-colored flowers. Blooms can be single or double, with long stems and slightly hairy leaves. A member of the Composite family, it can be grown as an annual or perennial and is used for ornamental, culinary and medicinal purposes. Petals are often used to tint rice to a golden color and as a



substitute for the more expensive herb, saffron. The leaves are a good potpourri or sachet ingredient, lending a fruity aroma to the mix. Concoctions made from the flowers and leaves can be applied externally for burns, wounds, sores, poison ivy and even shingles. It has few pest or disease problems and grows well in containers or in the garden. Deadhead to prolong blooming.

http://www.kyherb.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=5



Happy Groundhog Day- or Not?

Happy Groundhog day! For many people, this is a nice, little holiday, reminding us that spring may be just around the corner. However, for others, it is a reminder that the cute, furry little animal can be a huge problem! These common creatures are also known as woodchucks or whistle pigs. Woodchucks are members of the squirrel family. When these heavy-bodied rodents are surprised, they emit a loud, shrill whistle and dive into a burrow; hence the name whistle pig.

According to Wikipedia, perhaps the earliest known American reference to Groundhog Day can be found at the Historical Society of Berks County in Reading, Pennsylvania. The reference was made Feb. 4, 1841 in Morgantown, Berks County, Pennsylvania storekeeper James Morris' diary: "Last Tuesday, the 2nd, was Candlemas day, the day on which, according to the Germans, the Groundhog peeps out of his winter quarters and if he sees his shadow he pops back for another six weeks nap, but if the day be cloudy he remains out, as the weather is to be moderate." (The Folklore of American Holidays, ed. H. Cohen and T.P. Coffin (1987), page 57)

In the United States the tradition derives from a Scottish poem:

As the light grows longer
The cold grows stronger
If Candlemas be fair and bright
Winter will have another flight
If Candlemas be cloud and snow
Winter will be gone and not come again
A farmer should on Candlemas day
Have half his corn and half his hay
On Candlemas day if thorns hang a drop
You can be sure of a good pea crop

If you are of the mind that the groundhog is a nuisance animal, then Groundhog Day may not be high on your list of celebration days. According to Dr. Tom Barnes, UK Extension Wildlife Specialist, groundhogs are one of the most abundant animals in Kentucky. Woodchucks' extensive burrowing activity provides homes for other game and fur-bearing animals. In some areas, rabbit populations are directly linked to the number of vacant burrows available as denning sites. When woodchucks move from abandoned pastures and odd areas into fields, gardens and orchards, they can damage home gardens or vegetable crops, especially beans, peas, and squash. They can damage fruit trees by gnawing or clawing on the trunk. Their burrowing activities also create holes and mounds of soil, which present hazards to livestock, farm equipment, and humans.

Control is most effective in the spring, when active burrows are easily located. The most effective types of woodchuck control are shooting, trapping, and fumigation. Fencing may help reduce woodchuck damage; however, woodchucks are excellent climbers and can easily crawl over fences. No poisons are registered for controlling woodchucks in Kentucky. Woodchucks are considered a varmint and may be legally shot anytime of the year if they are damaging your property. You must have a valid Kentucky hunting license to shoot any wild animal. Live traps, Conibear traps and steel leg hold traps are effective in capturing woodchucks. Trapping is the best method to use near buildings or where fumigation may create a poison or fire hazard.

Hopefully you will have a warm and happy Groundhog Day! For more information call the Extension Office and ask for publication FOR-44, Managing Woodchuck Problems in Ky, or log onto <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/for/for44/For44.pdf>
or
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/pdf/wildlife/WOODCHUCKS.PDF>

Pruning fruit trees in the home landscape

Rick Durham, UK Consumer Horticulture Extension Specialist

February is a good time to start thinking about pruning fruit trees. It's best to prune most fruits while the plants are still dormant but after the severe weather of winter has past. This means late February and early March are the ideal times for pruning in Kentucky.

Fruit trees are trained and pruned to two basic growth patterns, the central leader, used for apple, pears, and some plums, and the open center, used for peaches, nectarines, and plums. Regardless of growth patterns, there are two main types of pruning cuts used, thinning out and heading back. Thinning out, removes an entire shoot back to a side shoot or scaffold limb. Thinning cuts open up the canopy to sunlight and air penetration and usually do not invigorate growth of the tree. Remove the shoot flush to the side shoot or scaffold limb without leaving a stub. The presence of a stub tends to delay healing and may promote the growth of unwanted suckers. Heading back, removes only the terminal portion of the shoot. Heading back cuts promote the growth of lower buds as well as several buds directly below the cut. Cuts made into one year old wood tend to invigorate growth by promoting branching directly behind the cut. Cuts made into two year old wood tend to be less invigorating and serve to help conform older trees to their allotted space and shape.

Dormant pruning should involve both heading back cuts and thinning out cuts. Thinning out cuts are used to eliminate diseased or unproductive branches. Also remove branches that are crossing and those that shade one another. Water sprouts or suckers that are vigorous upright branches growing from main branches should also be removed by thinning out cuts. Heading back cuts are usually made about one quarter of the way back from the terminus of a branch. Heading back cuts are used to encourage side branches and to stiffen the remaining branch. With apples and pears, fruit buds are produced on two to three year old wood or compact stems called spurs. Heading back cuts strengthen such wood so that it will support a heavy crop load. With peaches and nectarines, flower buds are produced on one year old wood. Heading back cuts on peaches promote new growth that will produce the flower buds for next year's crop. If pruning cuts are made correctly, healing will be fairly rapid. Do not use wound paint or any type dressings on the pruning cut. While the dormant season is the most important time to practice pruning, don't forget that some pruning during summer is also appropriate. If growth from heading back cuts is too vigorous, removal of some of the new growth by thinning out may be beneficial. Also, if the canopy is dense, remove some limbs during summer to open the canopy to sunlight and air penetration. And vigorous water sprouts or suckers should be removed as soon as they are noticed.

Another thing that needs to be done during the late dormant season (mid March or so) is an application of dormant or horticultural oil to fruit trees. These oils are specially formulated products and differ from motor oil or vegetable oils used for cooking. Horticultural or dormant oil is a very good chemical that has minimal impact on the environment and usually has little effect on beneficial insects in the landscape. Dormant oils target overwintering pests such as scale and certain mites. The oil acts by suffocating the pests. One precaution with the use of oil is that it should not be applied during extreme temperatures. Avoid applying oil when the temperature will drop below freezing the day before or the day after application. Also, avoid application if the temperature will rise above 90F - a rare occurrence in mid March. As with all chemicals, be sure to read and follow label directions when applying.

For more information on fruit trees click on <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Horticulture/homefruit.html>



Growing "Green" Tips

We all know that recycling, car-pooling, turning off the lights, and turning down the heat are great energy saving practices that we should be doing on a routine basis. However, many people don't think about "green" – environmentally friendly- practices when doing lawn and garden planning, planting and maintenance! Here are some tips for "greening" your landscape habits. These tips can help reduce harmful emissions, save water, and hopefully save you money too! I will include a few tips each month so that you can grow a "greener" home landscape!

1. Plant water-wise plants. I have a packet in the Extension Office that contains lists of plants that are low water using plants. Call and ask for the "Water-Wise Plant Package". These plants can survive on less water than many of our usual plants. These are the species that probably actually survived the drought last summer!
2. Reduce the use of turf in your landscape. Lawn grasses use a lot of water to stay healthy and

green, plus we burn a lot of gas in mowing! Lawn treatments can add potentially harmful chemicals into our earth and ground water systems. Replace turf areas with mulched beds of water-wise plants instead.

3. Recycle! Check with the City or County recycling units for what you can actually put in your bins. Then get in the habit of doing it! Make a goal of having more in your recycle bin than in your garbage can! Also compost as much of your fruit and vegetable scraps as you can instead of throwing it away.
 4. Don't accept or print paper receipts if you really don't need them. You often have the option now of not accepting a paper receipt at the gas station or the ATM. Just think of all the paper and trash we would save if everyone chose not to use paper for these receipts that usually are thrown on the ground or in the trash!
 5. Share or recycle your Horticulture Hotline! When you are finished reading, either share with a friend or recycle this newsletter!
- THANKS!

Research looks at winter protection for strawberries

By Laura Skillman

After a long winter, the taste of fresh, homegrown strawberries is a tantalizing treat, and consumers will pay top dollar for the first berries of the season. Having those first berries can mean higher profits for growers.

One of the biggest challenges in strawberry production is protecting the plants from winter's varying temperatures. Research is under way at the University of Kentucky Research and Education Center in Princeton to determine what is the best method to protect plants from winter freeze or damage. The research will not only look at winter survivability and yield but also ripening earliness.

"Strawberries are of interest to a lot of our growers and a great cash crop in the spring," said Joe Masabni, fruit and vegetable specialist with the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture. "The temperature fluctuations in late winter and early spring cause flower injury and yield reduction. In a year like last year with the Easter freeze, yields were significantly lowered, and some growers were completely out of business."

Masabni said previous research was done with high tunnels at UK. "The idea is to keep the plants alive and growing throughout the winter and not go completely dormant," Masabni said. "This will give them a 10-day jump start in spring growth because they aren't in deep dormancy." That can mean earlier ripe berries and higher profitability before most growers have any berries for sale.

The researchers are using the production method called plasticulture where the plants are planted in the fall, harvested in the spring and then removed. This method uses raised beds covered in plastic with each raised row having two rows of berries.

The experiment includes a high tunnel covering two beds and a medium-sized tunnel covering one bed. The tunnels are made from PVC, rope, clear plastic and anchors and are tall enough for a person to enter. The experiment also includes a small tunnel consisting of metal hoops covered with a floating row cover. They also have rows covered with just the floating row cover and plants that aren't covered at all. The strawberries were planted in mid-September and covered Dec. 1. Air and soil temperatures are being recorded for all treatments.

Using the breathable row covers instead of plastic on the small tunnels, which are only about 2-feet above the ground, requires less management because it does not have to be removed during the warmer late winter and early spring days, Masabni said.

Straw is commonly used on many matted-row strawberry beds in Kentucky. These are beds used for multiple years and planted directly into the soil. Straw is a good insulator but many times not enough is used, and by the end of the winter it has often been blown off the bed. The floating row cover is a better option, he said.

Working with Masabni on the project is Courtney Flood, UK fruit and vegetable extension associate. Flood said while the research is under way, they also plan to use the site for field days, grower meetings and workshops to educate growers on the different options. This will allow them to see how easy it is to utilize some of these methods.



Calendar of Things to Do

02/16/08; National Farm Machinery Show; Ky Exposition Center, Louisville

The National Farm Machinery Show and Championship Tractor Pull. Row after row of brand name products and services, hands-on demonstrations of the latest technology advancements, and a selection of free seminars that are both practical and informative.

<http://www.farmmachineryshow.org/> National Farm Machinery Show Hotline: (502) 367-5004,
Ticket Information Hotline: (502) 367-5001

Below Events are at Franklin Co Extension Office; contact 502-695-9035

02/15/08; 11:30am-1pm; Lunch & Learn- Underused and Unusual Plants

Join Fayette Co Extension Horticulturist, Jamie Dockery, and learn about plants that are terrific in the landscape, but are not often used. Bring your lunch, drinks and dessert provided! No cost, Pre-register.

02/16/08; 8:30am-Noon; Good Agricultural Practices Certification Training

Farmers- Learn how to use safe agricultural practices to prevent contamination on the farm. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, and the Kentucky Department for Public Health have joined together to ensure that Kentucky producers have the tools and information they need to reduce the risk of contamination from troubling pathogens. Pre-registration REQUIRED!

03/18/08; 5-9pm; Grow Your Own Shiitake Mushrooms

Join UK Forestry Specialist, Debra Hill, as she teaches us how to grow your own Shiitake Mushrooms. Information provided upon mandatory pre-registration and pre-payment. Class size limited. There will be a fee. Contact Kim Cowherd, kim.cowherd@uky.edu for more information.

Below Events Salato Wildlife Center; Contact Kristy.stroad@ky.gov;

(800)858-1549 x 429

2/20/2008; noon - 1 p.m.; Brown Bag Lunch - Whales & Tales: An Alaska Adventure!

Mary Carol Cooper has been exploring Alaska's beautiful countryside and unique wildlife. If you would like a change in scenery, then join us for lunch while she presents to us her exciting journey through Alaska! Bring your lunch and a friend! ; No registration. Free!

2/23/2008; 1p.m. - 4p.m. ;Winter Tree I.D. Hike

University of Kentucky dendrologist, Rob Parately, shows you how to identify woody plants using twigs, bark and other characteristics; ecology of the forest and the habitat certain trees prefer. If you want native "woody" plants in your landscape, this is an opportunity to get ideas about natives that grow best in Ky. Bring good hiking shoes, water, and be prepared for a moderately strenuous hike. Registration and pre-payment are required. Cost \$10

3/8/2008; 1p.m. - 4p.m.; Gourd Birdhouse Workshop;

Many birds depend upon man-made nesting sites for survival, such as purple martins. These birds can eat thousands of insects each night! If you're looking for a way to control mosquitoes, join us in painting your own gourd birdhouse.

Registration and pre-payment are required. Cost \$20

Below Events at the UK Arboretum; Contact (859) 257-6955;

www.ca.uky.edu/Arboretum

02/12/08; 10 – 11 a.m.; Restoring Your Lawn

Turf care expert Dr. A.J. Powell will discuss spring-season renovation techniques, new tall fescue varieties, and tips for fertilizing and mowing new seedlings. Please pre-register. Cost: \$5

02/21/08; 7:00 p.m. "Ten Months of Color in the Shade Garden"

Come hear Gene Bush, DePauw, Indiana, Munchkin Nursery and Gardens. This event will be held at the Gluck Equine Center Auditorium. Gene Bush is a well known writer and lecturer. His interests are in shade gardens using rare and unusual plants; native and non-native perennials.

He specializes in woodland and dwarf wildflowers with attention to color variety. Cost \$5



Kids Corner



Bird Watching

Jean Henry, Master Gardener Intern

Here's a project for a nature-lover who also enjoys exploring the internet. And it's also an opportunity for kids to contribute valuable information for science and conservation. (adults can participate, too!)



All you really need is a window with easy observation to your backyard birds. It helps, though, to have a feeding station to attract the birds. The project is led by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It's called the Great Backyard Bird Count and it takes place Feb.15-18. It only requires 15 minutes of observation time and then you record your tally online. (www.gbbsc/kids.org) If you don't have access to a computer, contact the extension office and we will mail you a tally sheet and instructions. (695-9035)

If your family doesn't have bird feeders set up, it's easy for you to get that started. It doesn't have to be fancy.

- Just put a pie pan out and fill it with seeds. Some birds actually prefer to eat at ground level. Expect sparrow, doves, and maybe juncos, purple finches, cardinals and wrens.
- Coat a pine cone with peanut butter, roll it in bird seed, tie a string around the top and hang it from a tree branch or porch railing. You might get a chickadee, maybe even a wren.
- Punch holes on either side of a plastic bottle, stick a twig all the way through with its ends sticking out for perches and poke more holes near the perch so the birds can pull the seeds out. Then hang the bottle by tying a string around its neck.

You will need to know the names of birds in order to count them. There are many books available in the public library to help you with this. And the GBBC web site has a really fun way to practice this. Just go to the Bird Quiz link. There are beautiful pictures, sounds and clues. There are other things to do there, too, for all age groups. Word seek puzzles, coloring sheets for 6 kinds of birds, some really cool jigsaw puzzles (you can compare your solving time to others who have done it) and much, much more!



~A Note from Kim~

Happy Valentine's Day! I hope that you are beginning to see very early leaf and flower buds swelling on some of your trees and shrubs- Spring will be here before we know it! Keep an eye on the weather for freezing temperatures and protect any plants that are confused from the early, sunny 50 degree days. If you haven't started planning your veggie garden or flower beds, it is time! You can start seeds this month indoors and get a jump start on those early crops. <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/gardencal/february.html> Here is a web link to a great gardening calendar, for those of you using the Internet. Happy Gardening!



Kim Cowherd
CES agent for Horticulture



GardenData.org is now a part of the national eXtension system.

Visit www.eXtension.org/horticulture. You may view FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions, including most of those previously available in GardenData.org) anonymously by clicking on the FAQs link. To submit a question in the Ask an Expert system you will need to establish an account by giving your email and setting a password for the national **eXtension** system. Just click the register link to establish your account. Your questions will be answered in much the same way as they were in GardenData.org.

Useful Web Links



<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Endangered/mammals/inba/curriculum/index.html>

The Indiana Bats, Kids, and Caves – Oh MY! 157-page activity book for educators is available online in PDF format for FREE download. Included are hands-on activities, worksheets, story starters, and more.

<http://www.missouriplants.com/Links.html> Lots of links to all kinds of plant data bases and other horticulture information.

<http://campus.murraystate.edu/academic/faculty/Howard.Whiteman/emuseum.shtml>

The E-Museum of Western Ky's Natural History- brought to you by Murray State University!

<http://www.kyherb.com/index.php> The Kentucky Herb Association Website. Check out the 16th Annual Herb Fest in May and the new Blue Licks Herb Festival in March!

<http://www.kidsgardening.com/> A site packed with ideas and opportunities for gardening with kids. Grant opportunities, news items, information on anything "green", project ideas, school gardening, contests, lesson plans- it's all here!

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Quibbles 'n' Bits

"Every mile is two in winter."
- George Herbert

"February, when the days of winter seem endless and no amount of wistful recollecting can bring back any air of summer."
- Shirley Jackson, *Raising Demons*

**The February sunshine steeps your boughs and tints
the buds and swells the leaves within."**
- William C. Bryant

"In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."
- William Blake

Contact the Extension Office at 695-9035 if you would like to receive our newsletter via email or email requests to ann.gill@uky.edu or kim.cowherd@uky.edu

If you DO NOT want to receive this newsletter, please call the Extension Office, and let us know!

